

Gloucester City Homes



Mystery Shopping Evaluation

Income Management

2010

Introduction

Gloucester City Homes currently gains feedback from customers in various ways including satisfaction surveys, focus groups, resident groups, block and street representatives, compliments, comments and complaints. Mystery shopping enables us to identify where our service standards and procedures need to be developed.

On this occasion, we evaluated our income management advice given to our customers. We did this by testing the advice provided to customers when they contacted Gloucester City Homes.

Timing of Exercise

The mystery shop exercises were conducted between 01 – 19 March and August 2010.

Executive Summary

Thirteen trained tenant mystery shoppers carried out the mystery shop but one customer was unable to complete questionnaire. There were three scenarios:

- Scenario 1 – Request for advice on low level rent arrears
- Scenario 2 – Request for advice on medium level rent arrears
- Scenario 3 – Request for advice on high level rent arrears

Each mystery shopper was provided with the relevant extension number for the Income Management Team Duty Officer according to the day they made the call.

In summary, the Mystery Shop exercise found a generally good response in all areas:

- Service Standards were adhered to in regards to the answering of calls.
- Rent statements were delivered within the Service Standard of five days.
- Advice was generally accurate and perceived as helpful by the mystery shoppers.
- Comments made by the mystery shoppers were very positive.

Areas of weakness identified were the provision of advice in regards to:

- The availability of the City Council Corporate Debt Scheme.
- Two CS team members declined to give advice

Please refer to the corresponding Reaction Report for response to the two areas of weakness identified in this report.

Results

How the calls were answered

The table below summarizes how the mystery shoppers' calls were answered by members of staff.

How quickly was the call answered?	After 1 ring	0
	After 2 rings	3
	After 3 rings	6
	After 4 rings	2
	After 5 rings	2
	>5 rings	
Did the staff member confirm you have got through to Gloucester City Homes?	Yes 13	No 0
Did the staff member give you their name?	Yes 11	No 1 (one report left blank)
Did the staff member ask if they can help you?	Yes 13	No 0
Was the staff member courteous?	Yes 13	No 0
Comments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) "Put through to duty officer but not there. CST member declined to deal with query, citing DPA & advised to get tenant to contact " b) "Met all criteria, very clear and concise" c) "Very polite and helpful" d) "First time calling, unhelpful and not prepared to put through to team without name & address of friend. Second time, put through no problems – very helpful" 		

Scenarios 1-3 – Request for advice on rent arrears

When the mystery shoppers contacted Gloucester City Homes, they explained that a friend or relative has rent arrears of £70 (Scenario 1), £220 (Scenario 2) or £530 (Scenario 3) and they would like advice on their behalf. The staff members were then asked a series of questions.

Results of enquiry

Mystery Shopper Questions	Staff Responses *
Scenarios 1-3 (maximum score 6)	
In what ways can your friend/relative pay the arrears?	Direct debit 9 Telephone GCH 8 Online via the GCH website 4 Automated telephone payment service on 0845 155 600 1 Post office 4 City Council office 5 PayPoint locations 5 Through employer 0 Other: a) Two callers were offered Standing Order b) Chat on phone or face to face c) Advised several ways to pay d) Phone office and make agreement to pay extra
Can they pay by credit card?	Yes 7 No 2 Yes but not encouraged as can lead to more debt 3 Other: a) One caller was advised yes, but then later was advised not encouraged
They're worried they can't pay all the arrears in one go. Is there any way around this?	Agree re-payment plan 12 Other: a) ask Housing Officer to call to discuss
They have just left their employment and are not sure if they qualify for benefits or tax credits. Where can they get advice on this? (if asked, your friend/relative left work voluntarily)	GCH 7 Council 5 City Council's housing and council tax benefits calculator via GCH website 8 Dept for Work & Pensions 3 HM Revenue & Customs 1 Other: a) Citizens Advice Bureau

	<p>b) would be told at GCH interview</p> <p>c) Relief orders</p> <p>e) Chat face to face or by phone</p> <p>f) Must make contact</p>
They are generally struggling with budgeting and other debts. Where can they get advice on debt management?	<p>GCH 5</p> <p>Citizens Advice Bureau 12</p> <p>Legal Advice Centre 4</p> <p>Local Neighbourhood Project 1</p> <p>National Debtline 2</p> <p>Other:</p> <p>a) Mother's union</p> <p>b) Many options available</p> <p>c) Law & GL Communities</p>
They also have council tax arrears of around £200. Is there any help available with this?	<p>City Council's Corporate Debt Scheme:</p> <p>Scenarios 1&2: 3 (one - if over £500)</p> <p>Scenario 3: 4</p> <p>Other:</p> <p>a) go to Council for advice.</p> <p>b) City Council Corporate Debt Scheme</p> <p>d) Citizen's Advice & Law Centre</p> <p>e) Lots of options but should initially apply for HB & CTB</p> <p>f) Inform Gloucester City Council</p>
Request also a rent statement by post for yourself.	<p>Waiting time (9/12 requested):</p> <p>1 working day: 2</p> <p>2 working days: 4</p> <p>3 working days: 2</p> <p>4 working days: 0</p> <p>5 working days: 1</p> <p>6+: 1</p> <p>Other:</p> <p>a) to be arranged</p> <p>b) not arrived on 6th working day</p>
Scenarios 2 & 3 only (maximum score 10)	
What is the legal action procedure if they do not pay their arrears?	<p>Notice Seeking Possession 1</p> <p>If no payment, apply to court for possession order, suspended possession order or postponed possession order 4</p> <p>If still no payment, apply to court for a warrant to evict 3</p> <p>Other:</p> <p>a) action dependent on level of arrears</p> <p>b) advised very serious consequences</p> <p>c) support first, speak/visit</p>

	d) would go to court
Where can they get legal advice?	Shelter 1 Legal advice centre 8 Other: a) CAB, Mother's Union, various other agencies b) Matson One Stop c) GCH Benefits advisor, CAB, Communities Centre (local)
Mystery shopper comments	
a) "answers given were all very clear and helpful" b) "Staff member politely declined to speak to me" c) "Very friendly and helpful" d) "Very vague in replies, talked rather fast. Nevertheless, very pleasant" e) "Very helpful, advised contact MUST be made, preferably with GCH first) and not leave situation to get worse" f) "Very helpful and professional"	

* Maximum score for each answer is 13

Results Analysis

Strengths

How the calls were answered

- All were answered within the Service Standard of 5 rings.
- The calls were all answered in the prescribed manner with the member of staff confirming the caller had come through to Gloucester City Homes, providing their name and asking how they could help.
- All members of staff were perceived as being courteous.

Response to questions

- The majority of methods of payment were provided.
- When asked about paying by credit card, staff members, on two out of five occasions, discouraged this due to the increase in debt.
- When advised that the individual cannot pay all the arrears at once, all staff members correctly pointed out the possibility of agreeing a re-payment plan.
- A good range of sources were provided to obtain advice on benefits and tax credits, including a local community project.
- A good range of sources were also provided to obtain advice on debt management.
- Correct advice was provided in regards to potential legal action following non-payment.
- Correct advice was also provided in regards to sources of legal guidance.

Rent statement request

- All rent statements requested were received by the mystery shoppers within the Service Standard of five working days.

Other strengths

- On several occasions, a variety of sources for advice were provided to the caller.

Mystery shopper comments

Positive comments made by the mystery shoppers include:

- “Answers given were all very clear and helpful”
- “Very helpful, advised contact MUST be made, preferably with GCH first) and not leave situation to get worse”
- “Very helpful and professional”

Weaknesses

How the calls were answered

- First point of contact not always willing to engage in advice giving. On two occasions, callers found it difficult to get put through to Income Management Team for advice and could not obtain basic advice from staff answering call.

Response to questions

- Incorrect advice was given regarding the City Council Corporate Debt Scheme. The Scheme, which enables tenants to agree a plan to repay Council tax, is only available to those tenants who have £500 or more rent arrears. However, one caller was advised this option was available, even though the tenant owed £70 in rent arrears.

Conclusion

The Mystery Shop exercise found a generally good response in all areas. Service Standards were adhered to in regards to the answering of calls and timely delivery of rent statements. Advice was generally accurate and although sometimes a little vague, was perceived as helpful by the mystery shoppers. Excellent customer service was demonstrated by the offer of office or home appointments by the Income Management Officers to provide further help and advice. In addition, comments made by the mystery shoppers were very positive. Please refer to the corresponding Reaction Report for response to the one area of weakness identified in this report.

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